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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 001753

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: BIAFRAN SEPARATISTS AND POLICE CLASH, BURN FIRST
PRESIDENT'S HOME

REF: ABUJA 1744

Classified By: Consul General Brian Browne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). Summary. During a demonstration in Onitsha (Anambra State) following the GON's arrest and detention of Ralph Uwazurike, the house of Nigeria's first post-independence President, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was razed. Uwazurike is the leader of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). At least one person is reported dead, two wounded, and eighteen MASSOB members have been arrested in Onitsha, Anambra State. End Summary.

MASSOB Leader's Arrest Leaves Many Discontents in the South

[12](#). (C) In late October, the State Security Service (SSS) arrested Ralph Uwazurike, whose separatist group MASSOB is known for mass "stay-at-homes" in southeastern Nigeria. (Note. MASSOB protests earlier in September reportedly claimed 6 lives. End Note.) At the time of Uwazurike's arrest, other MASSOB leaders promised to take action within seven days if Uwazurike were not released. The GON has charged Uwazurike and six others from MASSOB with treason. A journalist who spoke with him said Uwazurike complained the conditions of his SSS holding cell were "deplorable" and that he had been bound in "steel shackles." He reportedly requested a transfer to a prison. A hearing on the matter is scheduled for December 6, 2005.

At Least 1 Dead and Late President's House in Flames

[13](#). On November 7, MASSOB-led protests took place in three cities in Anambra State, as well as in Enugu, Imo, and Abia States. Protests were most disruptive in Anambra. During the protest in the busy market city of Onitsha, the home of the first post-independence President, the late Nnamdi Azikiwe, was burned to the ground. A nearby house and several vehicles were also destroyed. A local human rights activist reported police stationed near the home opened fire on protestors who were hurling insults and stones at them. The police killed one protestor and injured two. To avoid retribution, the police quickly took refuge in the house of the revered late Igbo leader. Angry protestors surrounded the house. When police refused to leave, the anger of the protestors at the temporary occupants of the house exceeded their respect for the person who built it. Thus, they set fire to the place. Police acknowledge frenzied MASSOB members set the house ablaze but claim that their officers had not sparked the destruction by previously firing at the protestors. The policemen were ultimately rescued from the blaze.

Governor Blames Political Enemies, Not MASSOB

[14](#). Anambra State Governor Chris Ngige visited the scene November 8. In a speech that day, he blamed the National Union of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) for taking advantage of a minor skirmish between police and protestors to loot the home and embarrass the government. Anambra's Governor is locked in a battle with NARTO over control of resources derived from motor park fees in Anambra. Ngige pledged to help rebuild Azikiwe's home.

[15](#). (C) Comment. The protests over Uwazurike's arrests are indicative of the feelings of many people in the Southeast. While most Igbos do not support secession, they empathize and attach themselves to the sentiments behind MASSOB. Thus, although few Igbos would support MASSOB to its logical conclusion, they do lend it their moral support; it is an effective, if often coarse, spokesperson for their political frustrations. Anambra state governor Ngige therefore found it convenient to blame others, not MASSOB, for damaging Azikiwe's homestead. Uwazurike's arrest appears part of a crackdown by the GON against the leaders of the major radical groups in the South. In addition to Uwazurike, Dokubo Asari from the South-South and Frederick Fasehun of the Oodua

People Congress (OPC) in the Southwest have been arrested. Evidently, the GON is betting that, in capturing the heads of these groups, the corpora will lose vitality. This tack could quiet these groups or lead to further protests and radicalization. The stability of significant portions of southern Nigeria will depend on whether the GON has bet wisely. End Comment.
BROWNE